



Grant Allowed Wisconsin to Explore Grass-Based Dairy

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MADISON – For years a group of Wisconsin collaborators explored pasture-based systems as a source of ‘specialty milk’ for value-added dairy processing. The final report of this research, possible through a North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Grant, is now available.

“About 22% of Wisconsin’s dairy farmers use managed grazing as their system for providing the bulk feed for their cattle,” said Laura Paine, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s Grazing and Organic Agriculture Specialist. “With the state’s tradition of artisan and value-added dairy production, it made sense to build on this foundation and explore the opportunity for grass-fed milk products in the marketplace.”

Paine coordinated the project, which included four years of research by farmers, processors, chefs and University of Wisconsin scientists on the chemistry and culinary performance of grass-based products. Consumer taste panels and a professional focus group were conducted. A market research report and video were created.

“Our group found that the color, texture, aroma and flavor of grass-based products were different from conventional dairy products,” added Paine. “Through formal and informal evaluations of the products, their performance and consumer response, we were able to make recommendations.”

Final recommendations included the need to organize grass-based dairy farmers and generate funds for marketing. The industry needs to create a standard that ensures the integrity of grass-based products and come to a consensus on what terms should be used to describe pasture-based milk.

A complete summary of the project is available at http://datcp.wi.gov/Farms/Grazing/Grass_Fed_Market_Development. The 26-page document gives an introduction to the project, background information, findings, consumer response, marketing positioning and recommendations for industry’s future.

“This project allowed us to find opportunities in the marketplace for grass-based products and identify challenges,” explained Paine. “By sharing the findings, we will be able to move the industry forward.”

One of the results of this grant is a video titled, “From Pasture to Plate.” This video provides an overview of grazing in dairy farming by featuring the farm of Bert Paris. Cheesemakers Mike Gingrich of Uplands Cheese Company and Bob Wills of Cedar Grove Cheese discussed the process of taking fresh, quality milk from grass-fed cows to make award-winning cheeses.

Leah Caplan of Metcalfe’s and Jack Kaestner of Oconomowoc Lakes Country Club shared their experiences using grass-based dairy products in cooking. These experts compared the unique physical, chemical and flavor differences in grass-based dairy products in side-by-side tests with other products. To access the video, visit youtube.com/widatcp.

“I encourage producers and consumers to learn more about the difference of grass-based dairy by watching this 12 minute video,” concluded Paine. “It follows the milk from the farmer’s pasture to the chef’s kitchen and gives a great summary of what was accomplished in the project.”

For more information, contact Paine, at 608-224-5120 or laura.paine@wi.gov, or visit the website at <http://datcp.wi.gov/Farms/Grazing/>.

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